

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. HAGAN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the period of morning business be extended until 5:45 p.m. under the same conditions as previously ordered.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NASA NOMINEES

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Madam President, later on this week, I will talk about the plans we have in the Space and Science Subcommittee of the Senate Commerce Committee to do the hearings on the President's nominee for the NASA Administrator and Deputy Administrator, and I will announce that timetable later, after conferring with Senator ROCKEFELLER, the chairman of the Commerce Committee.

I have a lot to say about the President's nominee, who I think is going to be one of the outstanding Administrators of NASA.

GEN Charlie Bolden will take over at a critical time in NASA's history because NASA is in drift. It is right at the ending of the life of the space shuttle as we finish the next eight missions to further complete the construction of the space station and equip it to be the national laboratory it is designed to be and then to ramp up in the development and testing of the new rocket, a program called Constellation, the rocket Aries, the capsule, hearkening back to some of the similar designs of the old capsule in the Apollo days, this one being called Orion, carrying a crew of up to seven, or should I say a crew of six. All that is now under review by a specially appointed Presidential commission, headed by a very esteemed aerospace expert, former Lockheed Martin CEO, now retired, Norm Augustine.

I will have more to say about this later, but let me congratulate President Obama on such an exceptional appointment. It is needed because our space program is certainly a part of the American character. GEN Charlie Bolden is the right person at the right time to lead this little agency out of the wilderness to the promised land, and that promised land is a robust space program, both human and unmanned, as we explore. That is what we are, we are explorers by nature.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Madam President, I wish to talk about health

care reform which is just about happening. We have an unprecedented opportunity to reform our health system. It has major flaws. It is one that has left 46 million people in this country without health insurance and millions of others are struggling to afford the cost of health care. It is in need of repair, and that is what this Senate, this Congress is going to try to tackle in the next few months. As a matter of fact, the majority leader has expressed his intention to have such a bill of monumental proportions on this Senate floor for consideration by next month. It is ambitious, but it is necessary. We have no choice but to succeed.

The health care costs are felt by many of our fellow Americans. There are significant economic costs associated with this broken system. Those who lack insurance have few options for care, which means they will delay and delay treatment until the condition worsens to the point that what could have been treated has turned into a full-blown emergency. Guess what happens. Where do they go? They go to the emergency room, and it is the most expensive place. As a result, the cost of that expensive care is borne by all Americans with health insurance by us paying higher premiums for those who do not have any insurance, but they still get the care.

This is a phenomenal statistic. According to research done by Families USA, our families in America with health insurance paid an additional \$1,000, on average, last year to cover the care for the uninsured.

One very important component, therefore, of this package that the Senate Finance Committee is going to take up pretty soon and try to pass—I hope we are able to do it—is bipartisanship. We keep hearing it is going to be done in a bipartisan way. I know the chairman and the ranking member of the Finance Committee are committed to trying to do that. But at the end of the day, the proof is going to be in the pudding. Are the Republicans on the Finance Committee going to support a committee approach? Will they support universal health insurance, which is what I described? It is hard to disagree with what I described, insuring all those 46 million so the average family does not pay an additional thousand bucks on their health insurance premiums to care for those who are uninsured. That is hard to disagree with. But somehow the word “universal” has some taint on it. That is what it is. So until we have everyone in the system, we are going to continue to see the inefficiencies and the cost shifting I described.

In this system that I think we are going to bring to the floor, those who like what they have are going to be able to keep it. If you are happy with your insurance, with your employer, and it is affordable to you, you can certainly keep it. But for those who cannot afford insurance or those who have

the very sad tales we have heard, have a preexisting condition and, therefore, they cannot even get insurance coverage, this insurance reform package is going to mean they are going to have access to insurance that is going to be affordable and that is going to be quality. In this reform system that I hope we are going to be able to pass, insurers are going to have to be prohibited from denying coverage based on a preexisting condition. The needs of those individuals are often the greatest, and they deserve to be met.

We are also going to try something called a health insurance exchange. It would simplify the process of purchasing insurance, and it could be simplified in purchasing it through a Web portal that would present all of the available insurance options in a comprehensive manner and in a comprehensible manner and expedite the enrollment process with a standardized application.

If you are satisfied with your employer's insurance, you stay right there. But all the others who want an alternative or cannot get insurance from an insurance company, they would have this health insurance exchange, participated in by the private insurance companies that would have a series of maybe a half-dozen standardized policies, that then those insurance companies would bid—make available, in other words—competition, get the free market competition going on for those who could offer the best policy at the best price for all those millions of Americans who would want to purchase from that health insurance exchange.

As we do this package, it is also important for us to focus on cost. Health care costs have skyrocketed. They have been increasing at a rate much higher than the average American's paycheck. In addition to placing a prohibitive financial burden on American families, these costs are affecting American businesses as well and their ability to compete in the global marketplace. So health care reform is going to have to be assisting individuals, families, and businesses in managing what has become an overwhelming expense.

As we consider this package, we ought to provide tax credits. We can do tax credits that could help small businesses to offset the cost of providing the insurance to their employees, if that is what they choose, instead of doing it through the health insurance exchange.

Tax credits could also be extended to low-income individuals to assist them in purchasing coverage from that exchange.

Along with those incentives, there would also come the responsibility for insurance coverage that would be shared by individuals and, in some cases, their employers.

Then we always have the question of what should be the eligibility in the Medicaid Program. Medicaid is a joint State-Federal program for the poor and